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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Sixty-third year

Identical letters dated 5 December 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Israeli settler terrorism against Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has been dramatically intensifying, heightening friction between the two sides and threatening to further destabilize the already fragile, tense situation on the ground. As settlers continue their reign of lawlessness, wreaking havoc on Palestinian civilians and their properties throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the situation in Al-Khalil (Hebron) in recent weeks and days has been most critical as a result of a surge of violence, harassment, intimidation and provocation by armed, extremist Israeli settlers.

The 650 Israeli settlers in Al-Khalil have for years pursued a fanatical, racist, violent agenda aimed at terrorizing the 150,000 Palestinian civilians in Al-Khalil and making their lives and existence in the city as unbearable and miserable as possible. This has included keeping Palestinian families hostage in their own homes as settlers routinely rampage throughout the city attacking and harassing civilians, including children and women, many of whom have suffered death and injury at the hands of the settlers, and destroying and pillaging Palestinian property, including homes, the marketplace and agricultural lands. Over the past few days, the settlers in and around Al-Khalil have escalated their campaign of terror with the burning of Palestinian homes, vehicles and orchards and even the desecration and defiling of Palestinian graves and mosques. Such provocative, criminal acts have inflamed tensions and led to an escalation of violent confrontations between the settlers and Palestinian civilians struggling to protect their homes and properties and the sanctity of their religious sites and graveyards.

The most recent incident took place yesterday, Thursday 4 December 2008, in which Israeli settlers burned a number of Palestinian homes in the old city of Al-Khalil and injured scores of Palestinian civilians in the area in an act of revenge for evacuating them from Palestinians homes in the Old City that they illegally took

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over. In this connection, B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, released footage documenting an Israeli settler shooting two members of a Palestinian family yesterday in Hebron. The footage shows settlers attacking a nearby house of the Abu-Se'ifan family in which an armed settler fired his handgun at 40-year-old Hosni Abu-Sufian, who was shot in the chest, critically injuring him. His father, 65-year-old Abdel Hai' Abu-Sufian, was also moderately wounded in the arm. The video also shows other members of the family, who managed to overcome the shooter before an Israeli security guard from the nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba arrived at the scene and fired his weapon into the air. B'Tselem is currently delivering the video to the Al-Khalil police, "demanding that the assailant is immediately brought to justice and that the involvement of the security guard be investigated."

Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, "condemned the ensuing violence and attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and the destruction and desecration of Palestinian property". He went on further to state that "Israel, as the occupying Power, is under obligation to protect Palestinian civilians, property and holy sites".

Today, the Palestinian leadership under President Mahmoud Abbas convened an urgent meeting and demanded that the Israeli government evacuate Israeli settlers from the old city of Al-Khalil in order to put an end to their crimes against the Palestinian civilians. The leadership also called for an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider providing protection to the Palestinian civilian population in the area.

This incident proves once again that the impunity of the Israeli settlers is directly abetted by the Israeli occupying forces, which typically stand idly by allowing settlers to harass, intimidate, terrorize and attack Palestinians and their lands and properties with no legal consequence for their actions and no protection for the innocent civilians. Even when they murder Palestinian civilians, Israeli settlers are rarely held accountable for their crimes and enjoy virtually complete immunity from the law. In this regard, we must state clearly that Israel, the occupying Power, is responsible for the actions of the settlers it has illegally transferred to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and it must be held accountable. Furthermore, the international community must remain firm in its condemnation and rejection of Israel's illegal settlement campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and must call upon Israel to take immediate action to bring about a cessation of all acts of settler violence and terror against Palestinian civilians.

This letter is in follow-up to our previous 322 letters to you regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 28 September 2000. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 17 November 2008 (A/ES-10/426–S/2008/717), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer